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TAGS: PREF PHUM PREL KZ UZ

SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN - ARREST OF UZBEK CITIZEN CONNECTED TO ANDIJAN EVENTS

REF: O'MARA-FAGIN APRIL 24 EMAIL

Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Steven Fagin, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) On April 25, Pol-Econ chief raised with MFA Americas Department head Talgat Kaliyev media reports that on April 20, Kazakhstani law enforcement authorities in Almaty had arrested Uzbek citizen Rafik Rakhmonov on various counts of participating in the 2005 Andijan events. A UNHCR spokesperson in Almaty was quoted in the press explaining that Rakhmonov had been registered recently by UNHCR as an asylum seeker. Pol-Econ chief explained to Kaliyev that Washington was concerned about the case, and while the timing of the arrest may have been a pure coincidence, there was the unfortunate appearance that it was a "deliverable" for Uzbek President Karimov's April 22-23 visit to Kazakhstan. He reminded Kaliyev that Kazakhstan had a strong record of non-refoulement of refugees, and asked Kaliyev to look into the Rakhmonov case and bring USG concerns to the attention of the Kazakhstani officials dealing with it. Kaliyev promised to follow up on this request.

¶2. (C) In a subsequent April 25 meeting in Almaty, Poloff discussed the Rakhmonov case with UNHCR Protection Officer Narasimha Rao. According to Rao, Rakhmonov approached UNHCR with a request for refugee status on or about April 10. Rakhmonov told UNHCR that he had been living in Kazakhstan for almost three years, and had not previously approached UNHCR because he had felt safe until very recently, when he saw himself mentioned on Uzbek television. Rao told Poloff that UNHCR had not yet conducted a refugee interview with Rakhmonov, so he did not know whether Rakhmonov would merit refugee status. Following Rakhmonov's arrest, UNHCR sent a diplomatic note requesting that arrangements be made so UNHCR could conduct a refugee interview, in accordance with Kazakhstan's international obligations. While UNHCR has not yet received a formal response, the MFA has informally assured UNHCR that the proper process will be adhered to in this case.

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